



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA COUPLE CONVICTED IN FEDERAL DRUG CASE

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that a California couple face between 15 years and life in prison after a jury in Del Rio, Texas, convicted them on federal drug and firearms charges.

In all, 47-year-old Rutilio Hernandez and his wife, 41-year-old Maria Hernandez of Dinuba, California, were each charged with: conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana; conspiracy to import more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana; conspiracy to use and possess a firearm during, in relation to, and in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime; and, three counts of conspiracy to commit money laundering (transport currency with intent to promote a specified unlawful activity, knowing that a transaction was designed to conceal the unlawful activity, and knowing that a transaction was designed to avoid a reporting requirement).

Testimony during the three-day trial revealed that from November 1998 until February 2002, the defendants organized the smuggling of approximately 11,000 pounds of marijuana into the United States and dozens of firearms and hundreds of thousands of dollars in drug proceeds into Mexico using fifth wheel travel trailers with hidden compartments. In addition, for purposes of forfeiture, the jury calculated the amount involved in the conspiracy to be \$5.3 million. The government is seeking the criminal forfeiture of that amount.

The defendants are in federal custody. Sentencing in this case is scheduled for 2:00pm on April 17, 2004, before Senior U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Texas Attorney General's Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation together with the Uvalde County Sheriff's Office. Assistant United States Attorney John Peralta is prosecuting this case on behalf of the government.

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